

Ask Scott Williams about the future for Petals and he simply replies, "more of the same". "Our Mission statement is to "send member florists as many profitable, trouble free orders as possible in a fair and equitable way".

To do this we need to keep generating orders via our member florists, our relay partners overseas and via local and international consumers. The more orders we generate, the more business we have for our members and the more profitable we all become.

Our goal is not necessarily to expand in size but rather to expand in efficiency and profitability".

The Internet had just become an option for businesses in Australia, and Internet costs were minuscule. In addition to the lower cost, the Internet also delivered raw data needing no human intervention and allowed for real time interaction with florists, relay services and customers around the world.

"As the Internet rolled out around the world, we adopted this new technology quickly as we estimated that our international relay service to relay service pipeline could easily be expanded to handle our potential volume. This also meant that florists in virtually any western country could now have convenient access to the Petals websites." Says Williams.

The Petals system provides for orders to be made using browser-enabled downloads. High volume users have a client-side download program interrogating the Web-mounted databases directly. Orders can be either converted into fax or sent electronically to their destination.

For example, the model allows a customer in New York to request an order from a florist, have it sent to the national mainframe and then via file transfer protocol to Petals, which communicates with a relay service in Amsterdam where the order is to be delivered, all before the customer has left the shop.

Any problems are entered online and stored for checking by Petals. This ensures sloppy florists are weeded out of the supply chain.

This highly automated supply chain model has made Petals one of most innovative relay services in the world.

- MIS Magazine - Managing Information Strategies – a leading IT magazine in Australia

www.petalsexchange.com

An innovative website for the benefit of the whole floral industry, this Petals initiative shows their commitment to the "big picture".

petalsexchange.com is a floral industry web site for use by florists, flower growers, flower wholesalers and export service providers.

It features a "Chat Room" where florists from anywhere in the world can communicate with each other quickly and easily over the Internet in real time. It has many other features including a cut flower encyclopedia, information on flower availability, florist education resources, flower prices, floral sundries, florist directory, a What's On calendar for the floral industry, an index of publications for the flower industry, etc.

When asked about the petalsexchange site, Scott explained that the original intent of the site was to "help the industry work together, to provide a "gateway" for producers to promote their products on a world market, and to allow anyone in the floral industry to interact with the peers online". It is designed to ensure the floral industry is in touch with the latest information available to them, courtesy of Petals.

On-Line order tracking – unique to Petals Network

Another huge benefit of Petals award winning communications technology is that florists or consumers can track their order themselves – online!! There's no need to waste a phone call, instead you can look up the website and find out if your order has been delivered at any time of the day or night.

Did you know...

That Petals was the first Australian relay service to use the Internet?

It's true – in 1994 when the Internet emerged as a viable business tool, Petals were first to list all of its member florists on its site to allow them to receive orders directly from customers.

Petals Achievements

Here's proof ...

Petals Network has been listed in Australia's main business magazine Business Review Weekly's Top 100 Fastest Growing Australian Businesses in 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2001.

August 2001: Awarded "Best Supply Chain" award by MIS Magazine for our innovative use of the Internet to ship floral orders around the world.

October 2000: Petals Network was awarded the Premier's New South Wales Regional Exporter of the Year Award in recognition of outstanding export achievement in regional New South Wales.

September 2000: the NSW Government invites Petals to be the curtain-raiser for Bill Gates at the 2020 Vision Presentation broadcast live around Australia in recognition of our innovative use of technology.

August 2000: Petals Network was awarded the coveted Government Insurance Organisations' GIO National Innovative Service Award for creative use of the Internet.

November 1996: Petals Network awarded the national Telstra and Australian Government Small Business of the Year

Pic: Scott and Bobbi receiving award
The future



PETALS NETWORK AUSTRALIA

Worldwide Florist Network Worldwide Florist Network
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Petals Worldwide turns 10!

"Our job is to send member florists as many profitable, trouble free orders as possible in a fair and equitable way"

From Garage to Global Glory!

Petals network is 10 years old and look how far they've come.

"Nothing captures the imagination better than a couple of entrepreneurs working from a garage at the bottom of a paddock beating the heavy weights of the global corporate world at their own game. And this is exactly what Bobbi Ballas and Scott Williams from Petals Network have achieved. In the 10 years since it started as a small florist in Armidale NSW, Petals has become one of the leading international florist exchange hubs, relaying orders for flowers across the world and ensuring they are executed.

With a user base of around 43,000 florists globally, the company has recorded an average growth rate of 62 per cent a year. It does this with a team of 11 employees, 50 telephone lines including an ISDN link, three Internet servers and 15 PCs."

Helene Zampetakis, writes about Petals in an article for MIS Magazine - a leading IT Magazine - after the announcement of Petals Network as a winner in the MIS Innovation Awards.

Petals have come a long way, and on this, their 10 year anniversary, they tell us how their growth and success comes from a combination of caring for their members, having a worldwide approach and being so technologically advanced that they're quickly becoming leaders in their field.

Size has nothing to do with it..

"We're not setting out to be the biggest but we are setting out to be the best. The best to us means fast order processing, simple systems and profitability for our florists and for us". Scott talks about his business and shows us why Petals is one of the most efficient relay businesses in the industry. "We're convinced that if we concentrate on being "better", the "bigger" will look after itself." And that's sure enough, with Petals Network being listed in Australia's main business magazine Business Review Weekly's Top 100 Fastest Growing Australian Businesses in 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2001.

Petals caring for their members

Petals – Florist support like no other!

They're not into sales campaigns that take orders away from their florists – they want to give their florists orders and help them with their businesses.

"Our florists are our business, so we have to look after them and provide them with as many orders as we can in direct response to the orders they send to us". Talking to Lindy Godwin, Petals Member Service Coordinator, we now know that Petals take their "fair trading policy" very seriously. This is to ensure that member florists receive orders in a fair and equitable way.

Petals also try to encourage business development for their florists by providing access to their e-commerce facilities and also by providing advice on setting up florists' own e-commerce systems.

Additionally, Petals publishes a series of business articles through both Magazines and "Webzines". These are written with florists in mind, giving them helpful tips for running their business and keeping them up to date with the latest news in the floral industry.

Petals have also looked into sales campaigns that support the florists and that don't take business away from them like their competitions 1800 phone campaigns. "We are committed to our Florists and we're constantly looking for ways to enhance their sales and their business. That's part of the role that we play" said CEO Scott Williams.

Petals - Customer Service is their highest priority

They're on the phone talking to their florists, taking orders and handling complaints – that's what they do best.

It's a nice change these days when you call a global company and you get a real person on the other end of the line. It's even better when that person can answer all of your questions quickly and efficiently, and sort out any problems that you might have.

This personal service to customers is one of Petals highest priorities. "Our staff are very experienced and can advise our customers on everything from international floral styles to time delays and currency conversion. They are skilled in complaint resolution and are committed to fast and efficient order processing." Scott Williams – CEO of Petals Network, is obviously proud of his staff and rightly so.

Many of the people in the call centre have been with Scott since 1992 when Petals first started.

"They are tremendously loyal and are just as

committed to customer service as I am."

Operations Manager Jill Tremayne, originally a florist, coordinates all of the administration and staffing at Petals. "The staff all get on extremely well and they are all very passionate about their work. Sometimes we put them under pressure (like trying to process 10 times the normal volume of orders on the Friday before Mothers Day this year) but they are hard workers and know that it's all for good reason".

Trading for all Florists big and small.

There are no "old boys" networks at Petals, their fair trading system ensures that all florists are treated equally.

One of the most innovative procedures Petals has is a unique "Fair Trading System". What's a fair trading system I hear you ask? It's an order allocating system that tries to ensure that for every order a florist sends to Petals, Petals will send them one back.

Naturally this depends on orders going to each area, but every effort is made to ensure florists get as many orders back as they send. The order allocation system is completely fair.

Petals commitment to fair trading often means that they cannot accept new members in certain areas. This is because the area in question is already serviced by other florists. "It's difficult to say no to high quality florists that are interested in becoming a member, but we must, in order to maintain our system of fair trading," explains Lindy Godwin, Petals Member Service Coordinator. In Australia for example, Petals members are sent at least as many orders as they send to Petals in 61% of Australian postcodes (and growing). A number of city postcodes are getting as many as 2 for 1! The downside to this is that new members are not being accepted in more and more postcodes, so that Petals can live up to their goal of fair trading.

So Lindy recommends "if you are thinking about becoming a Petals member, do it soon!!"

Complaint Resolution results

Less complaints (from 1.5% to 0.3%) and faster resolution of complaints is a direct result of accurate processing, a shorter supply chain and Petals commitment to their customers.

In any business, there are always complaints from customers. It's part of everyday business life, especially when you are dealing with hundreds of different orders and hundreds of different florists and hundreds of different delivery vans every day. At Petals however, they are committed to their goal of reducing the number of complaints and to speed up the resolution of complaints via their sophisticated communication technology. "It comes back to the shorter supply chain and the advanced Internet technology" Scott explains that because the Petals florist network is a more direct system than other relay services it's much easier to communicate with the florists quickly and easily. This is a win, win, win situation as if the consumer has a complaint, the florist can either follow it up with Petals or the supplying florist directly, anywhere in the world, so the solution can be delivered quickly. This is better for the consumers,



Pic: Top, Wendy, Lyn, Sarah, Narelle, Kirsty, Natalie, Bottom: Bianca, Helen, Scott, Jill, Julie-Ann Fair

Petals Anniversary

its and for Petals as time is saved, and time is money.

The fact is that it's working. Petals complaints have reduced from 1.5% (1 in 75 orders) down to as low as 0.3% (1 in 300 orders). Current complaints average 0.5% (1 in 200 orders), which is a staggering reduction.

The other benefit of this system is that because all complaints are logged, it enables Petals to quickly identify florists that aren't performing and retire them from the network. That way Petals can ensure that only the most reliable and efficient florists are members of the Petals team.

Petals Flexibility gives our florists choice

Some florists are big and some are small, some like to use the Internet and some like to use the phone. It doesn't matter to Petals, their system is flexible enough to suit them all.

Petals have a constant focus on personal service to their member florists. This is a benefit of being a specialised business and having staff that understand the needs and the wants of their customers. The provision of this personal service extends to flexible order transmission systems and payment systems. Operations Manager Jill Tremayne explains, "Not all florists are the same, and that's why we adjust our system to the varying needs of our member florists. Some florists like to use the Internet and email to transmit their orders and payment. Other florists prefer to phone or fax their orders through and receive monthly statements. We can handle whichever system they prefer as it makes business easier for them and that's what Petals is all about."

Having a world wide approach...

Petals Worldwide

Working with over 43,000 florists globally, 22 international web sites and various relay partners around the world, Petals are truly a worldwide company – and growing fast!

Petals is constantly expanding its global operations. They currently act as a conduit for many other relay services across the world.

In the United States, it partners with two of the three largest flower sending organisations, taking all of their orders to Australia, and many for other countries as well.

Also in countries like the United Kingdom, Germany, Holland and France, Petals are working with a number of key florists for both their national and international relay orders.

In total, Petals now have web sites for over 22 countries worldwide. Of these countries, the United Kingdom and Australia are showing the fastest growth, with the United States, Germany and France not far behind.

Fast international supply chain

Some relay services get back to you in days.

Petals get back to you in hours.

Petals award winning communications technology and short supply chain makes ordering and communicating with florists so much easier and so much faster.

While other floral relay services use their partner relay services in that country, Petals have their own international network. This means that there is often a much shorter supply chain in that the order goes from florist to Petals to florist (anywhere in the world). Other relay services send the order from florist to relay to Overseas relay to florist.

This means that Petals have faster deliveries, simpler ordering systems and much more efficient communication and order tracking.

In fact, the ordering florist can get in touch with the supplying florist directly via Petals "PIN Websites" for even faster communication and tracking. Best of all, this can all occur in real time, the florist in Aust can get onto the PIN site at night from home and contact the supplying florist overseas in real time and get a response back that night.

Other relay services only operate in working hours which slows up this process considerably – i.e. it can take up to 2 days to get an answer from the supplying florist overseas.

Being so technologically advanced...

E-Commerce

When Scott Williams was asked by the NSW Government to be the curtain-raiser for Bill Gates at the 2020 Vision Presentation last year, it was a true indication that Petals Network has developed one of the most innovative e-commerce systems in Australia.

It's hard to believe that a floral relay business tucked away in regional Australia would be announced a Winner of a National IT Innovation Award. But it did, alongside with such well known companies as Australia's leading telecommunications company Telstra, The Australian Governments Dept of Public Works, International financial company Knight Frank Price Waterhouse and worldwide communications giant Vodaphone, just to name a few.

The MIS* Innovation Awards, judged by an independent panel of experts including leading IT professionals, consultants and analysts from across Australia voted Petals as the Winner in the "Supply Chain" Category, here's why.

When Petals started in 1992, all orders were transmitted via the telephone, which was a high cost and time consuming system. The introduction of a fax machine reduced costs but did nothing to eliminate the disadvantage of time or the problems associated with human error.

Pic: Florist to RELAY to OVERSEAS RELAY to Florist